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# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

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Talk by Mr. Bert Sheldon  
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Once upon a time there were two lawyers in Springfield, Illinois. One was Abraham Lincoln. One was Edward Dickinson Baker. Although both Lincoln and his English-born friend, Edward Dickinson Baker, are vital symbols of our democracy, in their early lives they gave little indication of the admirable qualities they possessed until our democratic free enterprise system gave them opportunity and encouragement.

Lincoln and his friend Baker are each represented in marble statues beneath the great dome of our Capitol. It is indeed fitting and proper that they both should be there - together.

In 1811, when Lincoln was two years old, living in a log cabin near Hodgenville, Kentucky, Edward Dickinson Baker was born in London, England. His father was a school teacher. The Baker family as English emigrants came to America and settled in Philadelphia. When the family had been here but a short time the father died leaving the young mother and her small children in difficult circumstances in a new and strange land. Edward became an apprentice weaver.

When Edward was 15 years old, his family moved to Bellville, St. Clair County, Illinois. Judge Clayer of Carrollton, Illinois, took Edward as office boy and law clerk. Edward read law and at 19 was admitted to the bar. Both Baker and Lincoln came up from very humble circumstances. Both were self-educated.

At 20, Edward Baker married Mary Lee, a widow with two children. Four years later he moved his family to Springfield, Illinois. At 24 he was well known as a lawyer and public speaker. For seven years he was a member of the Illinois State Legislature. For two years of that period Lincoln and Baker served together as Whig members.

In 1843 Lincoln, although extremely eager to be elected to Congress, for party harmony stepped aside in favor of Baker. Lincoln was thus put in the position of helping to elect another to the post which he had most ambitiously wanted for himself. A letter which Lincoln wrote referring to his withdrawal in favor of Baker says: "I shall be a good deal like a fellow who is made best man to the bridegroom who has cut him out and is marrying his own dear gal".

Baker was elected to the 29th Congress as a Whig. Lincoln stayed home in Illinois. They were, and remained, the best of friends as was evidenced by the fact that when Lincoln's second son was born a year later he was named Edward Baker Lincoln.

When the Mexican War began, Baker took military leave from Congress and returned to Illinois to help raise troops. He was so successful that more young men volunteered than there was need for. Baker was commissioned a Colonel with the troops he had raised and went off to war. In December of that same year he left his regiment on the Rio Grande and returned but briefly to Congress. In uniform, and still a member of the House of Representatives on military leave, he made a moving and impassioned plea for better equipment and more of it for our American soldiers. He soon returned to war and was responsible for command of a brigade at Cerro Gorda when General Shields was wounded. Baker served as one of the most capable officers in the entire Army in every action all the way to Mexico City.



Soon after he resigned his military commission, Baker moved to Galena, Illinois, a Democratic stronghold. Now a Republican, and there only three weeks, Baker was elected to the 31st Congress. When 40 years old, Baker moved to California.

He was not successful in California politics, but managed to do handsomely as a lawyer and public speaker. One of the classics of California history is the eloquent oration by Baker at the funeral of Senator David C. Broderick in Lone Mountain Cemetery, San Francisco, in September 1859. A short time later a delegation of the Oregon Republican Committee came to California and urged Baker to come to Oregon to assume political leadership. When but a few months in his new Oregon home, Baker was elected to the United States Senate and took his seat in December 1860. President-elect Lincoln, still in Illinois, sent for Baker to come to Springfield. Baker went to help and advise an old and good friend.

Seven Southern States had seceded from the Union by Christmas 1860, and the irrepressible conflict was like a threatening storm on the horizon. On February 11, 1861, a damp snowy morning in Springfield, Lincoln stood on the rear platform of the train which was to carry him into the future. To his neighbors, the townspeople assembled there, he spoke as follows:

"My friends, no one not in my situation can appreciate my feelings of sadness at this meeting. To this place and the kindness of these people I owe everything. Here I have lived for a quarter of a century and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children were born and one lies buried. I now leave not knowing when or whether ever I will return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me and yet remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care, commending you as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

The 4th of March came with dark clouds in the morning. They cleared away by noon. Lincoln and Buchanan rode together over historic Pennsylvania Avenue, the inaugural parade route. The old, low, wooden dome of the Capitol had been removed. The new dome was far from complete. A platform had been erected on the east front of the Capitol. The people were gathered there to make Mr. Lincoln President, but President of a not-so-United States of America. Senator Baker of Oregon very briefly introduced Lincoln to the huge crowd. The man later to be called the Great Emancipator, wearing his black suit, black boots, and white shirt stood close by and towered above Chief Justice Taney, who had rendered the Dred-Scott Supreme Court Decision that a Negro had absolutely no legal rights. Taney then administered the oath of office to Lincoln who, in his first inaugural address, said:

"I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so. I have no inclination to do so. In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without yourselves being the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the Government while I have the most solemn one to preserve, protect, and defend it. We are not enemies but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break, our bonds of affection."



Of the speech, John Gilmer of North Carolina, to whom Lincoln had offered a Cabinet post, asked: "What more does any reasonable person expect or desire?". Jubal Early, in the Virginia State Convention, spoke well of Lincoln and blamed the States that had seceded for the perilous condition of our Country.

Fort Sumter was fired on 39 days later. Confederate Secretary of State Robert Toombs warned that "The firing on that fort will inaugurate a civil war greater than any the world has ever seen. Both in peace and in war people need to be retold, they need to be stimulated, they need to have old faiths confirmed."

The committee in charge of a patriotic mass meeting at Union Square, New York City, wanted a distinguished and eloquent speaker. They chose Senator Baker of Oregon. Seven days after Fort Sumter Baker spoke before an enormous crowd and made a thrilling appeal for military enlistments and preservation of the Union.

There was extreme hair-trigger hostility in Congress and in the Senate as Southern Senators heatedly voiced their States Rights beliefs and Northern Senators just as vigorously defended the Union in opposition to secession. On one occasion, for example, a Congressman came from the House into the Senate Chamber and beat Senator Sumner over the head with a cane until the cane broke. Nevertheless, Senator Baker, always a stimulating speaker, a man of great personal courage, and a strong Union man, was not one whose brilliant oratory was stilled in the time of crisis. On at least two occasions he entered into debate with Southern Senators in defense of the Union. Each time he chose distinguished opponents. He made reply to Senator Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana on one occasion. On another occasion Senator Baker, in military uniform, came into the Senate Chamber after drilling his troops and entered into fierce debate with distinguished Kentucky Senator John C. Breckenridge. Both Benjamin and Breckenridge were later Confederate Secretaries of War. Baker is the only man who ever occupied both a House and Senate seat in military uniform.

Baker refused a promotion to Brigadier General in the Union Army, preferring to remain a Colonel with his 71st Pennsylvania Infantry, called the California Regiment as a tribute to their popular commander, though they were troops he had raised in New York and Pennsylvania. On September 21, 1861, Baker was made a Major General of Volunteers.

Thirty days later, Senator Baker (Major General Edward Dickinson Baker) from England, from Pennsylvania, from Illinois, from valorous and victorious battlefields of the Mexican War, from California, from Oregon, in the Union Army on military leave from the Senate, was killed at Balls Bluff on the Potomac River near Leesburg, some 35 miles from Washington.

Later that day, President Lincoln visited military headquarters. He shook hands all around and remarked about the beauty of the day. A Lieutenant asked the President to step into an inner office where telegraph instruments were clicking loudly. A few minutes later Lincoln reappeared. Tears streamed down his face. His color was ashen. He failed to see the sentry who saluted him or to hear the cheerful greeting "Good day Mr. President". He stumbled as he stepped off the curb. A moment later General McClelland came from the telegraph office. There was not much to report, he said. The Union forces had been defeated at a place called Balls Bluff and a Union General named Baker was believed to have been killed.



A brief portion of an article in the Washington Star stated that "General Baker's body was removed to Holmes' Embalming Parlor on Pennsylvania Avenue near 9th Street. The torn and bloody uniform has been removed and this morning he lay clad in a new uniform. Today the President will visit the remains of his friend."

The eight bullet wounds suffered at Balls Bluff stilled forever the eloquent voice of the English-born patriotic American friend of President Lincoln. Baker's body was taken back to Lone Mountain Cemetery where two short and dramatic years before he had made his brilliant oration over the grave of Senator Broderick.

The war continued until April 9, 1865. Five days later a crazy actor shot and killed the Commander-in-Chief of the Union forces. Both Lincoln and Baker were war casualties. Both died in the service of our Nation. Both had humble origin. Both were self-made men. One was an immigrant.

One of the really great advantages, then and now, of our American way of life is the opportunity it offers for the development of greatness and leadership from the rank and file of our common people. The rise of Baker and Lincoln to greatness was certainly encouraged and made possible by our American way of life.

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women are merely actors on it. Certainly our America was then and is now a vitally important part of that vast world stage.

American citizenship today, for the newcomer as for those who have enjoyed its privileges in the past, is more than an opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is a responsibility too. It obligates each of us as citizens to work for the restoration of justice and peace to our present torn world. If this is to be accomplished our older as well as our newer citizen must reaffirm his faith in the fundamentals of American citizenship and remain deeply conscious of the necessity for their preservation.



